

Session 1

Opening Prayer

Come Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful, and enkindle in them the fire of your love. Send forth your Spirit and they shall be created. And you shall renew the face of the earth. O God, who has taught the hearts of the faithful by the light of the Holy Spirit, grant that by the gift of the same Spirit we may be always truly wise and ever rejoice in his consolation. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Our Lady, Comforter of the Afflicted, pray for us

St Josephine Bakhita, pray for us.

Intercessions, followed by: **Our Father....Hail Mary...Glory be....**

Scripture: Genesis 9:20-27

Noah planted a vineyard; and he drank of the wine, and became drunk, and lay uncovered in his tent. And his son Ham, the father of Canaan, saw the nakedness of his father, and told his two brothers outside. Then Shem and Japheth took a garment, laid it upon both their shoulders, and walked backward and covered the nakedness of their father; their faces were turned away and they did not see their father's nakedness. When Noah awoke from his wine and knew what his youngest son had done to him, he said, "Cursed be Canaan; a slave of slaves shall he be to his brothers." He also said, "Blessed by the Lord my God be Shem and let Canaan be his slave. God enlarge Japheth...and let Canaan be his slave."

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Ham's disrespect for his father Noah drove Noah to curse his insolent son and to bless the others, those who honoured him. This created an inequality between brothers born of the same womb. In the account of the origins of the human family, the sin of estrangement from God, from the father figure and from the brother (Abel), becomes an expression of the refusal of communion. It gives rise to a culture of enslavement (cf. Gen 9:25-27), with all its consequences extending from generation to generation: rejection of others, their mistreatment, violations of their dignity and fundamental rights, and institutionalised inequality...The Good News of Jesus Christ, in whom God makes "all things new" (Rev 21:5), is also capable of redeeming human relationships, including those between slaves and masters, by shedding light on what both have in common: adoptive sonship (of God) and the bond of brotherhood in Christ.

Slavery, seen as a crime against humanity, has been formally abolished throughout the world. The right of each person not to be kept in a state of slavery or servitude has been recognised in international law as inviolable. Yet, even though the international community has adopted numerous agreements aimed at ending slavery in all its forms, and has launched various strategies to combat this phenomenon, millions of people today – children, women and men of all ages – are deprived of freedom and are forced to live in conditions akin to slavery. I think of the living conditions of many migrants who, in their dramatic odyssey, experience hunger, are deprived of freedom, robbed of their possessions, or undergo physical and sexual abuse. In a particular way, I think of those among them who, upon arriving at their destination after a gruelling journey marked by fear and insecurity, are detained in at times inhumane conditions.